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ABSTRACT

Two variables that may affect speech criticism were studied: the sex of the speaker and the rater's attitude of sexism. An ancillary study concerning the effect of the sex of the teacher was also undertaken. The study included the development of an instrument to measure sexism, which revealed some of the effects of sex and sexism on the criticism of classroom speeches. Sexist speech teachers were classified as those who perceived maximum differences between persons based on sex roles. Four male and four female teachers who perceived maximum differences between male and female sex roles and four male and four female teachers who perceived minimal differences cooperated in the study. The results indicated that in speech critiques, sexist speech teachers wrote a significantly smaller number of comments than did nonsexist teachers. It was also noted that male students received a significantly lower proportion of positive comments than did female students from both sexist and nonsexist teachers. (HKM)

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THE INFLUENCE OF SEX AND SEXISM ON THE CRITICISM OF CLASSROOM SPEECHES

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THE INFLUENCE OF SEX AND SEXISM ON THE CRITICISM OF CLASSROOM SPEECHES

This article includes a systematic examination of two variables that may affect speech criticism: the sex of the speaker and the rater's attitude of sexism. An ancillary finding concerning the effect of the sex of the teacher is also reported. The study included the development of an instrument to measure sexism which revealed some of the effects of sex and sexism on the criticism of classroom speeches. Sexist speech teachers were classified as those who perceived maximum differences between persons based on sex roles. In speech critiques, these teachers wrote a significantly smaller number of comments than did nonsexist teachers. Male students received a significantly lower proportion of positive comments than did female students.

The criticism of classroom speeches is central to the effective teaching of speech. Communication educators recognize the importance of criticism in pedagogy,[1] and communication research evidences the key role played by criticism.[2] Recent investigations have considered the rating errors that appear to occur in speech criticism.[3] The traits of the rater or critic and the characteristics of the student or speaker are among the factors which seem to account for

rating errors.[4] Three variables that may affect speech criticism are the sex of the rater, the sex of the speaker, and the rater's predisposition on sexism. A systematic examination of these variables provides the teacher and the researcher with more precise knowledge about the process of speech criticism.

Sex of the rater. Educational research on the role of the teacher's sex has not provided consistent findings. Newton, for example, reported that women gave higher grades than did men,[5] but Hart and Olander showed that men were more lenient than women in grading behavior.[6] Social research has similarly investigated the implications of the experimenter's sex with equally conflicting results. Binder, McConnell, and Sjoholm, for instance, report that female experimenters achieve better results,[7] while Sarason and Harmatz demonstrate that males are more successful,[8] and Ferguson and Buss could find no significant differences between male and female experimenters.[9]

Studies in speech communication classrooms also provide inconsistent results. Bryan and Wilke found that men and women were about equally lenient as evaluators,[10] but Pfister,[11] and Bock, Powell, Kitchens, and Flavin[12] demonstrated that women tended to be more lenient than men as evaluators. Moreover, Haiman showed that female evaluators

rated the ethos of speakers more leniently than did male evaluators,[13] Sikkink found that women rated persuasive speeches higher for persuasiveness than did men,[14] and Sprague showed that female teachers wrote significantly more delivery comments, positive comments, and personal comments than did male teachers.[15] The effect of the sex of the rater on speech criticism has not been consistent nor conclusive.

Sex of the speaker. The sex of the speaker may account for differential evaluation. The field of education provides a sizable body of literature which focuses on the sex of the student. These studies demonstrate differential treatment of students based on sex in the areas of grading and interaction, but suggest that other relevant variables must be taken into consideration. Lobaugh found that girls had a significantly higher grade point average than boys, but girls consistently rater lower on achievement tests.[16] Swenson found that, over a nine year period, girls outnumbered boys in a National Honor Society, even though there was no substantial difference in their intelligence.[17] Shinnerer found that boys had more failures at the secondary-school level and that girls had a consistent and substantial advantage over boys in obtaining honor ranks. He concluded that differential grading behavior which resulted in overrating of girls and underrating of boys was responsible.[18] Carter held intelligence constant and found that boys were assigned lower grades than girls, regardless of whether the

teacher was male or female.[19]

Three studies found that teacher disapproval occurred more frequently with boys than with girls.[20] Similarly, two studies determined that teachers are more likely to use a harsh or angry tone than a conversational tone when criticizing boys.[21] Davis and Slobodian did not find that female teachers discriminated against male students, but they did conclude that boys exhibited more problem behavior than do girls.[22] Jackson, Silberman, and Wolfson analyzed tape recordings of teachers discussing their students and found that boys received more signs of personal involvement and their descriptions contained more negatively toned statements than did those of girls.[23] Similarly, Brophy and Good found that teacher disapproval and teacher approval occurs more often with boys than with girls and that there was a tendency toward greater involvement by boys in more student-teacher contacts of all types than girls.[24] Two later studies showed that student behavior rather than student sex might be responsible for the differential treatment.[25]

Most recently, Good, Sikes, and Brophy found no evidence to support the notion that teachers favor students of their own sex nor that female teachers are biased against male students. Their data support, instead, the conclusion that male and female teachers treat male and female students similarly. While teachers do not treat male and female students the same way, male teachers appear to exhibit the same behavior toward each sex that earlier studies showed to

exist for female teachers. Differences by student's sex included the finding that boys were more active and interacted more frequently with teachers, that boys were asked more process questions while girls were asked more product and choice questions, that even though girls received fewer contacts from teachers, proportionally more of them were positive. High achieving male students received the most favorable teacher treatment while low achieving male students received the least favorable treatment. This study contradicts, to some extent, the earlier findings that boys receive inferior treatment from teachers and suggests, instead, that earlier results were due to lack of categorization within each sex.[26]

Researchers considering the speaker's sex in classroom criticism have drawn three separate conclusions: (1) female students receive more positive comments than do male students when grades are held constant,[27] (2) women tend to grade men higher than women,[28] and (3) men tend to grade women higher than men.[29] Male and female students may be receiving differential evaluation as a function of their sex or as a function of different behavior.

The conclusions that have been drawn concerning the effect of the sex of the teacher, or rater, on grading and evaluation are unstable. The research focusing on the sex of the student, or speaker, have generally demonstrated that women receive preferential treatment over men, but recent studies suggest that this discrimination may be due

student behavior rather than student sex. Interactions between the sex of the teacher and the sex of the student further confound the problem.

Personality traits, attitudes, and predispositions of the evaluator also seem to affect evaluation. Bostrom demonstrated that rigid evaluators tended to rate speakers lower than did persons who were non-rigid,[30] and Bock showed that people who are difficult to persuade rated speakers lower than did raters who were easy to persuade.[31] Rigidity and persuasibility are among the evaluators' characteristics which may affect the speech evaluation process.

Another predisposition which may affect speech criticism is a person's sexism--that is, the extent to which a person believes that typical behaviors and specific dispositions exist which are appropriate for each of the sexes. Sexism may be viewed as one form of dogmatism and may represent rigidity in the rater. Sexism may also account for the discrepancy in the findings on the effect of the sex of the teacher on criticism or may provide further explanation for the differential treatment of male and female students in the speech communication classroom.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND HYPOTHESES

In order to add additional knowledge to the information already available, the purpose of this study was to determine the effects of sexism of the rater and the sex of the speaker on speech criticism. The study consisted of two stages.

First, an instrument was created to give a measure of sexism. The definition of sexism, given above, was operationalized as follows:

A person is not necessarily considered sexist,

1) If (s)he recognized and identified biological differences between the sexes; for example, "Men and women have different genitalia."
2) If (s)he recognized and identified descriptive differences between the sexes; for example, "Men are more successful at high jumping than are women."
3) If (s)he recognized and identified historical differences between the sexes; for example, "The ten most outstanding Presidents of the United States have been men."

A person is recognized as sexist,

1) If (s)he maintained that one sex should be restricted from certain roles, occupations, lifestyles, or positions, not as a function of the biological, descriptive, or historical differences between the two sexes, but as a result of a stereotyped perception of appropriate behavior for that sex; for example, "No woman could be a good President of the United States."
2) If (s)he maintained that certain characteristics, other than biological, descriptive, and historical differences, are unique to one sex; for example, "Women are always so emotional!"

The question to be answered in the first stage of the research was: How sexist is this individual? In the second stage

the question to be answered was: What is the relationship between an individual's sexism or nonsexism, the sex of the student he or she is critiquing, and his or her written critique behavior? To answer that question, the following research hypotheses were tested:

H_1 Teachers who perceive minimum differences in sex roles will criticize classroom speeches in a significantly different manner than will teachers who perceive maximum differences in sex roles.

H_2 The classroom speeches of male students will be criticized in a manner that is significantly different from the manner in which the classroom speeches of female students are criticized.

H_3 The sex of the student and the teacher's attitude will interact to affect significantly the criticism of classroom speeches.

The effect of the teacher's sex was not hypothesized since the findings on this variable are unstable. In addition, the interactions between the teacher's sex and the student's sex; and the teacher's sex and the teacher's attitude; and the teacher's sex, student's sex, and the teacher's attitude were not hypothesized because of the lack of any clear or consistent conclusions. However, the design of the study provides data concerning this main effect and these interactions and includes these ancillary findings.

METHOD

Development of the Instrument

The first step in this study was to develop an instrument to measure an individual's perceptions of the differences between the sex roles. No existing instrument could be found. Most standard sex role instruments, like the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, measure an individual's description of his or her own sex role rather than his or her perception of differences and similarities in men and women, in general. Beginning with the definition of sexual stereotypes, three hundred and sixty-six items were generated. These items fell roughly into four categories: 1) the appropriateness of various occupations or professions, 2) the use of adjectives as descriptors, 3) the cultural or biological explanation for certain perceived differences, and 4) attitudes on issues relating to the topic of sexism.

Within the first category, 105 different occupations were identified. Some were believed, *a priori*, to be distinctively male professions; some were thought to be associated with females; and others were selected without a sexual preference. The second category explored the possibility of identifying certain descriptors as "female" or "male," and was constructed using one hundred thirty-eight words from the semantic differential to identify certain words as "feminine" or "masculine."[32] The third category was a result of "explanations" given in psychological literature for the real or imputed

differences between males and females.[33] Seventy items were generated. The final category included forty-four items typical to an attitude survey. These items were prompted by such sources as contemporary commentators on the women's movement and on women[34] and recent research in psychology and sociology.[35]

This three hundred and sixty-six item, four-part instrument was administered to two groups of people. The first group included fifty-five persons who stated that they believed that men and women were totally different in almost every way. The second group included fifty-seven people who stated that they felt that no differences, or only very minimal differences, existed between men and women. T-tests were run on the items and those sixty-nine items which best discriminated between the two groups were selected for inclusion in the final instrument. Test-retest reliability on these items based on two ratings one month apart had an average correlation of .80. Internal reliability for the instrument was .86.

Variables

Two independent variables were examined: the teacher's perception of sex roles and the student's sex. The five dependent variables that were considered were five content analysis categories in the written criticism given by the teacher. The first was the total number of comment themes, or individual comments, which was the basic coding unit for the study defined as the "subject-predicate assertion, either explicit or clearly implicit."[36] Examples of comment themes are "Good job," "Your delivery seemed artificial,"

and "Introduction worked well." The second variable was the proportion of content comments which was calculated by dividing the content comments by the total comments. A content comment was "any comment dealing with ideas, reasoning, evidence, organization, or language,"[37] such as "Interesting topic choice." A delivery comment was "any comment dealing with the physical and vocal elements of communication, such as rate, volume, vocal inflection, eye contact, gestures, posture, poise, articulation or pronunciation,"[38] such as "Poor eye contact." The third variable was the proportion of positive comments which was determined by dividing the positive comments by the total comments. Positive comments were defined as "any comment which praises or expresses approval of the speaker or the speech performance,"[39] such as "Strong conclusion." Negative comments were defined as "any comment which expresses disapproval or makes a suggestion for improvement,"[40] such as "Try to develop your ideas further." The fourth dependent variable was the proportion of personal comments and was determined by dividing the personal comments by the total comments. Personal comments included "any comment in which the teacher expresses his or her own affective response, opinion, attitude or experience or which makes a comparison to a previous speaking performance of the same student,"[41] such as "You really improved your use of supporting materials." Impersonal comments included "cognitive comments dealing with the application of standards of good speaking,"[42] such as "Clear organization is essential."

The fifth dependent variable was the proportion of atomistic comments to the total comments. Atomistic comments were defined as "any comment which deals with some isolable aspect of the speech performance,"[43] such as "Adequate use of statistical evidence," and holistic comments were defined as "any comment which deals with the overall speech performance, without specifying any particular component of the performance."[44] "Great speech!" would be an example of a holistic comment.

Procedure

One hundred twenty-five high school teachers received the instrument by mail. Fifty-nine of them returned completed instruments permitting the identification of six male teachers who perceived the greatest difference between male and female sex roles; the six female teachers who perceived the greatest difference; the six male teachers who perceived the least difference between male and female sex roles; the six female teachers who perceived the least difference.

Four male and four female teachers who perceived maximum differences between male and female sex roles and four male and four female teachers who perceived minimal differences cooperated in the study. These teachers were not told the purpose of the study, but rather that a group of people were interested in studying high school speeches and high school speech criticism. Each of the sixteen teachers received twenty critique sheets--blank sheets which simply asked for the name of the student, the name of the teacher, the

grade assigned, and "Comments"--on which to record their written speech criticism.

Critiques for two male students and for two female students criticized by each instructor were selected randomly and the written criticism was content analyzed by two persons trained in content analysis methods. Inter-rater reliability for these two persons performing the content analysis in this study was .96. The results that follow are based on these analyses.

Statistical Design

The statistical design employed in analyzing the data was a three-way factorial. In this two-by-two-by-two factorial, the first factor was the sex of the teacher and contained two levels, male and female. The second factor, teacher's perceptions of sex roles, also had two levels--perception of maximum differences in sex roles and perceptions of minimum differences in sex roles. The third factor, student's sex, contained the two levels of male and female.

RESULTS

Sixty-four pieces of written criticism comprised the content sample; these written critiques contained a total of 621 themes. In order to test the hypotheses under investigation, the results were broken down into the various teacher and student groups of interest.

The data obtained in the study were analyzed by use of a three-way analysis of variance. A separate analysis was completed for each dimension: the mean number of themes; the proportion of content comments, positive comments, personal

comments, and atomistic comments. The analysis of variance for the mean number of comment themes given per student for each of the variables indicated that a significant difference occurs in the mean number of themes assigned to each student speaker between those teachers who perceive maximum differences between persons based on sex and those teachers who perceive minimum differences ($F = 6.16$; d.f. $= 1, 12$; $p < .05$). The analysis of variance which considered the proportion of positive themes for each of the variables of interest indicates a significant difference on the variable of sex of the student ($F = 4.82$; d. f. $= 1, 12$; $p < .05$). The additional three analyses of variance--the proportion of content themes, the proportion of personal themes, and the proportion of atomistic themes did not yield significant differences or significant interactions.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis, that teachers who perceive maximum differences in sex roles criticize classroom speeches in a significantly different manner than do teachers who perceive minimum differences in sex roles, appears tenable. A significant difference was found between these two groups on the mean number of themes each wrote: those teachers who perceived maximum differences wrote significantly fewer comments.

The difference between the two groups on the mean number of themes written might be explained as follows. Those teachers who perceive many differences between female and male persons might draw stereotypical generalizations that do not take into account more specific characteristics or qualities. It follows that their comments would be fewer in number as they tend to draw general conclusions and apply them to a class of instances. As the tendency to generalize increased, the total number of comments decreased.

The second hypothesis, that the speeches of male students would be criticized in a manner that is significantly different from the speeches of female students, appears to be verified. A significant difference occurred between males and females on the proportion of positive comments: male students received a lower proportion of positive comments than did female students. These results should be considered in the context of previous research. To the extent that theorists and educators stress positive over negative criticism, it appears that women receive preferential treatment on the positive/negative dimension of speech criticism.

The third hypothesis, that the sex of the student and the teacher's attitude would interact to affect significantly the criticism of classroom speeches was not verified. It could not be shown that sexist and nonsexist teachers differ in their treatment of male and female students. Sexist and nonsexist teachers do exhibit different critiquing behavior on the dimension of the number of comments they write to all

students, but they show no differential treatment to the two sexes. Similarly, male and female students receive different speech critiques as women receive proportionally more positive comments. However, these differences between the two student groups do not appear to be a result of differential treatment based on sex. This result calls into question the conclusion of earlier researchers that teachers treat male and female students differently, based on sex, and appears to support the contention of later researchers who suggested that other factors such as student behavior may account for differential treatment.

The peripheral findings including the additional main effect--the sex of the teacher--and the interactions between the sex of the teacher and the sex of the student; between the sex of the teacher and the attitude of the teacher; and among the sex of the teacher, the sex of the student, and the attitude of the teacher which were not hypothesized were not verified. These results suggest that the variable of the teacher's sex may be less important than other factors in predicting teacher behavior.

The results of this study must be cautiously interpreted. The small sample size limited the statistical power of the tests made. Further, the two hypotheses that appear to be tenable are each supported by only one of five possible measures. Research which is currently in progress by the author will overcome the sample size problem and may more clearly verify the hypotheses under investigation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

The results of this study have implications for researchers and teachers in the field of speech communication. Researchers might consider four implications from the study. First, they may wish to consider the role that certain attitudes, personality variables, and predispositions of the rater--particularly sexism--play in the process of speech criticism. The evidence suggests differences in critiquing behavior based on the dimension of sexism.

Second, the sex of the student or speaker must continue to be a significant consideration in the research on criticism. We should continue to seek an understanding of why male and female students receive differential treatment from teachers. The explanation of differences in sex may not provide a sufficient answer. Differences in behavior and other characteristics of the student as well as predispositions of the teacher should all be considered as possible avenues of explanation.

Third, research can be completed which further clarifies the relationship between the attitude of sexism and a teacher's treatment of his or her students. In this study, sexist teachers did not discriminate between male and female students in a manner that was different from the way nonsexist teachers discriminated between them. While sexist and nonsexist teachers did exhibit different critiquing behavior, it was not along the lines that might be expected. The results demonstrated that a sexist bias does affect a teacher's written speech criticism behavior. Future studies

might utilize various behavioral observational methods in order to examine the influence of sexism in other subject-matter classrooms and on other levels--including pre- and elementary school.

Finally, researchers in the discipline may reconsider the role that teacher's sex plays in speech criticism. This study did not hypothesize differences based on sex of the teacher nor were any found. Conclusions concerning the effect of teacher's sex on speech criticism appear tenuous, at best. Further examination of differences in teacher behavior as a function of sex should be done in the context of the various educational levels. Sex differences in teacher behavior at the elementary school level, for instance, might not be generalizable to the secondary level.

Speech communication teachers may also find implications in this study. This research reminds us of some of the factors in the communication situation which may affect our criticism. Knowledge about these variables and how they appear to affect criticism increases our sensitivity to what has been termed "rater errors." While we may wish to talk about "differences in rating" rather than "errors in rating;" nonetheless, we recognize that differential treatment toward students as a function of our own characteristics or of the student's sex is potentially harmful. As we continue to systematically investigate factors that affect speech criticism in the speech communication classroom, we may find that our criticism is more equitable to ourselves and to our students.

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